

P R O M I S

THE MEN WHO SOLD THE WORLD ... AND THE MAN WHO TOLD THE STORY.

His book is the book the Israelis tried to stop, written by the man they said didn't exist - the book that George Bush and the CIA tried to sabotage.

For more than ten helter-skelter, hair-raising years, Ari Ben-Menashe was the golden-haired boy of Israel's deadly spy service.

After a year in a US jail on trumped-up charges, Ari Ben-Menashe is ready to tell his story.

By Glenn Krawczyk

Ari Ben-Menashe is a man without a home, a country, or many friends in the cut-throat world of international intelligence. In his recently released book entitled *Profits of War*, the sensational story of the worldwide arms conspiracy, Ben-Menashe details the unbelievable story of an international cabal of well-connected intelligence community and corporate arms dealers who, as the title of the book suggests, wage war to covertly gain power, influence and personal wealth. Ben-Menashe is the man responsible for leaking the information that eventually led to the Iran-contra investigations and the demise (or sacrifice) of Oliver North who, it turns out, was only a small player in a much much bigger game.

After serving in the External Relations Department of Israeli Military Intelligence and acting as personal national security advisor to Yitzhak Shamir (former President of Israel) for a total of twelve years, Ben-Menashe has written what must arguably rate as one the most important political and intelligence exposés ever.

I met with Ari Ben-Menashe twice during 1991 to discuss various issues, including the theft by the US Justice Department of the most sophisticated data-collecting computer program ever developed, which is known as "The Inslaw Affair", and the subsequent modification and international sale of that program to various countries around the world, including Australia, by a CIA front-company and an Israeli Intelligence front-company owned and run by Robert Maxwell.

The Dossier Society

The computer program we are talking about is called Promis and its use presents the biggest threat to individual rights by any computer technology in use today. Not only that, it has given US Intelligence agencies access to extremely sensitive information stored in the databases of possibly as many as eighty-eight countries around the globe.

Ben-Menashe devotes an entire chapter of his book detailing the joint American-Israeli initiative to sell Promis to intelligence and law enforcement agencies worldwide, and gives several examples of how the program has been used to interfere with the political process of various countries and keep track of citizens.

Since obtaining an illegal copy of the program over a decade ago, the Central Intelligence Agency has, in conjunction with Israeli Intelligence, embarked on a highly-successful worldwide initiative to install "bugged" copies of the software in computer systems run by intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, (as well as other government organisations), to which they now covertly have unlimited access.

One of the earliest "leaks" regarding this covert computer double-dealing came out in an article entitled "Spy vs. Spy", (written by Zuhair Kashmeri for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*), which was published on Saturday 20 April 1991. Devoted entirely to the

Promis initiative, the article quotes one of Kashmeri's Canadian Intelligence sources: "Some of our allies, such as Australia, are furious after they found out from the revelations of the Inslaw Case that they were sucked into buying Promis." Kashmeri confirmed to one of my colleagues that he has had a twelve year relationship with the two intelligence sources who supplied the information for the article and that they had always proved reliable in the past.

It is the most sophisticated computer database that has ever been developed in the world. You can essentially get everything about anybody you want to know.

At the time I interviewed Ben-Menashe, it proved very hard to authenticate all his claims. Although Israeli Intelligence denied all knowledge of him for some time, I was informed by a helpful contact within the Australian Democrats that he had indeed worked there for them, and, was given copies of various personal references that supported the claim. After later interviewing Bill Hamilton, the director of Inslaw Inc., the company that wrote the program, and other individuals familiar with the case, I felt quite confident that Ari Ben-Menashe knew exactly what he was talking about.

On 1 September 1992, an investigative committee of the US Congress released an investigative report on the Inslaw Case, which outlines the controversial history of the Promis software. It took three years of investigation to complete the report, due in part to the withholding of evidence by government agencies connected to the theft, modification and distribution of the program, as well as the intimidation of important witnesses. In order to slow down and mislead the investigation there have been arrests, on false charges, of individuals informing the judicial committee, as well as the suspicious death (read: murder) of journalist Danny Casolaro, who had been investigating the Inslaw Case and its links to the October Surprise, Iran-contra Affair, and BCCI bank collapse. Far from answering all the questions, the report concludes that a far more thorough and far-reaching investigation must be urgently undertaken.

The committee's report confirms many of Ari Ben-Menashe's claims. He was, in fact, one of the key sources of their information. I put the following questions to him when we met in 1991:

GK: What is Promis?

B-M: It is the most sophisticated computer database that has ever been developed in the world. Computers are very widely used by the intelligence community; it's the main source of information about people. You can essentially get everything about anybody you want to know.

GK: To what extent would it be used by the intelligence community to collect information about the civilian population?

B-M: It's quite widely used, all over the world, to collect information about dissidents, opposition leaders, and so on.

What does it do? I'll give you an example which is very interesting. You have a computer, put this program on it, and connect this computer to the water company, to the electric company, to IATA (International Air Travel Association), to credit card companies, to the tax department, bank accounts, to anything you like to

think ... phone lines, where someone calls to, which is very important. Other than tapping him, now you can also have a written record of all the telephone numbers he or she dials. So if you want Mr. Joe Smith and everything he does, it's the only program that can bring all this data from everywhere ...

GK: Globally?

B-M: Globally, yes, onto one screen! It's a very sophisticated program. I mean, this is the biggest infringement of privacy on anybody, anything.

Is there any privacy? I mean, the government agencies would be able to monitor anybody's activities as they wish. Very quickly too. Once they have this information, who knows what they do with it.

GK: How quickly can Promis assimilate information and provide a dossier on a person?

B-M: If its hooked up correctly, a matter of seconds. It is a better information collection system than any other. I mean, I think it put the satellites out of business.

GK: Have you seen this in operation?

B-M: Oh yeah. You know, this program makes George Orwell's '1984' look like ... (nervous laugh). George Orwell was modest.

What this program can do, the only one in the world that can do this, is first of all make sure when you're talking about "Harry Smith" it's the same "Harry Smith", because there could be ten "Harry Smith's". It would compare notes, check common denominators, and it would find Harry Smith. His water usage, his electric usage, how many times he has travelled abroad, what does he do with his credit cards, his car licence number, all sorts of stuff. Put it together, and there you go. You have everything you want to know about this person.

The first version was ready in 1979/80. In '81 he (Bill Hamilton) offers it to the Justice Department, because it's also good for law

It is a better information collection system than any other. I mean, I think it put the satellites out of business.

enforcement. He offers it, and then suddenly the National Security Agency has it. It's given to the Israeli's in '82, and it's being marketed around the world, given to allies and non-allies. The reason being, it was bugged as well. What you would do is basically set it up for one government, and without letting that government know, have a phone tap on that computer and can pull out information for yourself also. They bugged their allies as well!

I'll give you an example. The Americans sold it on our behalf (Israel) to some Arab countries. Jordanian Military Intelligence had it in '82 and they were collecting data on the Palestinians. The Palestinians were threatening the king (Hussein) as well. We were also sharing that information with them.

GK: Without their knowledge?

B-M: Of course, without their knowledge. Now, the two countries that marketed, the two security forces that marketed this program, one was Israel and one was the United States. Israel did it

through various computer companies owned by Robert Maxwell. The Americans on the other hand did it through a company called Hadron, based in the United States, owned by the owner of UPI (United Press International), a fellow by the name of Earl Brian. He used to be Reagan's Secretary of Welfare and Health in California, when Reagan was governor. Then he was working for the intelligence services. Basically his companies were "attached" to the CIA. The CIA was marketing it for the National Security Agency. One of the Maxwell companies sold it to the GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence) and that was bugged. The West knew what was going on in that theatre faster than the Russians.

Another example. South Africa. Great place. It was given to them without the bug. It was set up through a company called Degem, owned by Maxwell. This program tracked ANC (African National Congress) people, and what came out of the computer was handed to the Buthelezi people (Inkatha) and then you had "black-on-black" violence.

GK: And meanwhile, was this being monitored by the US as well?

B-M: Yes. It's funny you know, there was also a terminal in Pretoria that was used by the South African Military Intelligence, and the U Embassy and that place share a wall, so...

GK: How widespread is the use of Promis in other countries?

B-M: It's quite widespread. Most of the Western allies have it. The Australians have it, the British have it, as we said the South Africans have it, the Nicaraguans have it, even the Guatemalans. The ex-East Bloc countries have it too. I believe that since 1990 most of them have checked it for bugs, but they still use it. MI5, MI6, the Russians.

GK: Who is using it in Australia?

B-M: ASIO (The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation).

GK: Do you know who installed Promis in Australia?

B-M: Yes I do. It was Hadron.

GK: Could the use of Promis be seem as a threat to privacy of the general public?

B-M: Sure. That's what it's all about.

GK: So it couldn't be written off as something that's just there to monitor terrorist groups and so on?

It's a matter of monitoring people that are getting in the way of the government, keeping everybody in line.

B-M: Sure. That's what they say. But what's a terrorist? I mean what is national security, what is all this? It's a matter of monitoring people that are getting in the way of the government, keeping everybody in line.

Once you have this technology and you know everything everybody else is doing, or whomever you want to follow ... you can basically control other people that way. You can put in disinformation, do all kinds of things, block bank transfers, you know, stop people doing things or make sure they don't have money, or their money doesn't come through on time, and so on.

There's so much that can be done with this information. Simple things. You don't have to be very sophisticated. Cancel reserva-

tions, slow down bank transfers, put in a computer that a credit card is no good. Just imagine, all you have is your American Express card, and you're stuck somewhere around the world and the computer shows that your card is no good! Simple as that. And then when you complain three weeks later, "sorry, mistake.". But in the meantime, for three weeks you were in trouble.

GK: I have been told that the National Crime Authority in Australia is setting up a database to monitor every single bank transaction over \$5,000. I suppose that system might be useful for this purpose as well?

Each bureaucrat, or each guy that runs some section of a listening agency wants his empire to grow, and it grows and goes out of control.

B-M: It's the same database by the way. They just got a condensed version of Promis. It's not called Promis, but once the program is out...

GK: How much of a connection is there between intelligence agencies and banks or other private organisations that hold extensive and sensitive computer records?

B-M: Well, I think what happens is that the intelligence agencies become the centre of all of it. You know, the banks monitor the money, other guys monitor stuff, but the intelligence agencies put it all together.

GK: So they have access to banking records?

B-M: Oh sure. They have access to everything. This is why a lot of countries love the idea of ID cards, because this way it makes things easier. Or they use a social security number or tax file number. Initially the idea was to do it all through law enforcement and that kind of thing, but since it didn't work, because of parliament or congress or whatever, they just had to do it through the back door. It's the same thing, and again, it's governments and bureaucracies trying to control everybody's lives.

GK: When you look at all the intelligence gathering capabilities, surveillance, eavesdropping, tracking, monitoring and so on, it seems that they are all evolving and interlocking more and more. Is it steamrolling out of control?

B-M: Yes, yes. I've always said this. It is getting out of control. I mean, suddenly you have everything being monitored. Everything.

GK: Do we need it? I mean, what are they going to do with all this information?

B-M: Who knows. But it's bureaucracy. Everybody loves it. Each bureaucrat, or each guy that runs some section of a listening agency wants his empire to grow, and it grows and goes out of control. Remember that intelligence bureaucracies are just like everything else, they get over zealous.

I sometimes wonder, how the United States government ... I mean, \$600 million for a stealth bomber. One stealth bomber! With \$600 million you could clean up Los Angeles and all its homeless. But you know, "security", "defence", "the communists are coming". But I guess the communists aren't coming any more. We need to find a new enemy. (Cynical.)

GK: The question I get asked all the time is "how do they keep all this a secret?"

B-M: It's easy. Everybody protects his job. And I'll tell you another thing. Most of these guys in national security, what do they do? They either sit down listening all day, or running their computers or re-listening to tapes. Some of these jobs are very menial. He comes home. His wife asks him something. "It's secret. I can't tell you". It's also a means of protection. It's easy. This guy starts talking publicly... he's gone.

And there's another thing. Each person has a very small amount of knowledge, unless you get to a senior level, and once you get there you're part of the system. Each person has this very small thing he does. In twenty years how many people have broken rank? Not that many who are sufficiently up there to know.

But my question today is what is it all for?

GK: That's what we would like to know!

B-M: When you look back at it, it's a whole load of bullshit crap, bureaucrats keeping people in work and keeping tabs on their opponents.

GK: But is all this surveillance capability so powerful now that it's impossible to resist unfair government practice?

B-M: It's hard to resist unfair government practices. It's very hard. I mean, how do you do it? You're fighting ghosts basically. But bureaucracies can be fought if you know how they operate. It's hard, but you can do it, you know, stay ahead.

GK: You're suggesting that it's more bureaucracy out of control than some grand conspiracy then?

B-M: Yep! That's what it is. I never ran into any "super-commission". That's what it is. Friends with mutual interests protecting each other's powerbases or their own powerbases. That's how it goes. I don't see it as one grand conspiracy. It's just there's technology and bureaucrats, they want to do their job well, so the collection becomes larger and larger. More collection and more information.

GK: What happens when interests collide then, say on a national level?

B-M: Then you have a fight. That's what they call a "crisis"!

GK: Are we heading to a point where this is all too fragile, this reliance on technology and a "balance of terror"?

B-M: Would your life be any different if you were not monitored? Probably better. But the average person, what does he care? The way I see it, you go to work, you get your house, you give half of what you earn toward the house, at the age of 60 you own the house and live off your pension.

You stay in line, you get the house. I mean, this whole issue of mortgage is ... make sure they get married at a certain age, you have two children, and that's how everybody's in line. You work all your life to pay your mortgage, and if you don't work you lose your house. Perform or...

GK: In terms of gathering information on people, are there any moral criteria as far as the intelligence community or bureaucrats are concerned?

B-M: Moral criteria about what? If you're targeting somebody, you're targeting somebody.

The National Safety Council Link

Another interesting connection may well lie in the cover-up of the activities of the National Safety Council of Australia, Victorian Division, and the activities and alleged "suicide" of its director, John Friedrich. In the 23 September 1991, issue of the American political newspaper *Spotlight*, the following passage appears: "Two weeks before Casolaro's death in early August, John Friedrich was found dead in Sale, Australia. He suffered a single

bullet wound to the head and his death was termed a suicide. Friedrich was a close ally of Lt. Col. Oliver North and (Amiran) Nir. He had a lot of knowledge about the Iran-contra and Inslaw cases. Nir died in a plane crash in Mexico."

It is interesting to note that when the current affairs show *Page One* ran a story on John Friedrich and the NSCA scandal on 27 March 1989, they went out of their way to make it look like Friedrich had engineered the entire fraud perpetrated by the NSCA. They ended their report with an interview with Friedrich's replacement at the NSCA, asking, "Is he (Friedrich) the sort of man who would contemplate suicide?", the reply, "I've tried to think that through in my mind, I believe that it would be possible, but I of course can't say if that is what's happened" This was seventeen months before Friedrich's alleged suicide actually took place.

Could it be that Friedrich's "suicide" was actually a disappearance planned well in advance due to the heat that was being put on the NSCA by investigators, and the questions being raised by the public? Since when is suicide the expected behaviour pattern of a "failed businessman"?

It seemed to me to be a very odd question to finish the report with, but it is worth noting that Channel 10, the television station that ran *Page One*, was owned by Christopher Skase at the time of the report, another of the well-connected and high flying West-Australian businessmen who has since fallen from grace. In an article written by himself, Friedrich posed questions about how businessmen like Alan Bond and Christopher Skase became so wealthy, so fast. It's likely he knew exactly how and why.

As for the true nature of the NSCA's activities, Friedrich wrote, "If 'intelligence' means the world of covert government action, both Australian and overseas, then yes, we were involved in some intelligence work.. I don't know how people can really believe that it was possible for one man to make happen all that existed at Sale and elsewhere. And if I was getting the nod from people above, why were they giving it? There are ten so-called joint United States-Australian government installations in Australia. The Americans want to have people around who can keep an eye on these installations, who can respond, if necessary, to threats to those installations. The US has valuable and important facilities here. It likes to know they are safe. Much of my career is bound up in this fact ... there was considerable interest in the NSCA Victoria Division in a number key areas of government and industry, including the Department of Defence, the Federal Police, some State police forces, the Foreign Affairs Department, and the Attorney-General's Department."

No doubt many of these government departments would have been ecstatic to get hold of a computer program with the surveillance capabilities of Promis. Perhaps Friedrich was the man who connected them to the people who were marketing it.



References:

1. Interviews by the author with Ari Ben-Menashe, conducted 29 Jan 1991 and 8 Feb 1991.
2. "The Inslaw Affair" Investigative Report by the Committee on the Judiciary, United States House of Representatives, 102d Congress, 2d Session. Report 102-857.
3. *Profits of War* by Ari Ben-Menashe, Allen and Unwin Pty Ltd., Sydney, 1992.
4. *Spy vs. Spy*; by Zuhair Kashmeri, *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, Sat 20 April 1991.
5. "I, Spy: John Friedrich in his Own Words" by John Friedrich, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sat. 12 Oct 1991.
6. "Reagan-Era Inslaw Scandal" by Harry Martin, *Spotlight*, 23 Sept 1991, Washington, USA.